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## Changes in Research on Judaism in the Hellenistic and Early Roman Periods : An Invitation to Interdisciplinarity

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## **Changes in Research on Judaism in the Hellenistic and Early Roman Periods: An Invitation to Interdisciplinarity**

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This article offers an overview of what every theologian and scholar of religion should know about changes in biblical studies that have taken place concerning the past depreciation of Second Temple Judaism, the use of newly discovered sources and their implications, as well as integrative approaches to top-down (reflected beliefs, prescribed practices, textual sources) and bottom-up (intuitive beliefs, lived practices, material culture) processes. Changes in the field lead to the re-writing of the history of the Bible and of Judaeen society in the Greco-Roman context. By means of this co-authored research article, we wish to demonstrate the benefit of, as well as the need for, interdisciplinary work in the study of antiquity.

**Keywords:** (late) Second Temple Judaism, beliefs and practices, materiality, textuality, Hellenization, Romanization, Bible, Dead Sea Scrolls

## Introduction

The study of Judaism in the Hellenistic and early Roman periods (c. 333 BCE–70 CE) was for a long time overshadowed by other scholarly interests, such as those in historical Jesus, the rise of early Christianity, and rabbinic Judaism. This article tackles from various perspectives the crucial changes that have taken place in recent decades. The very names for this period are telling. Earlier scholarship used derogatory terms such as *Spätjudentum* for Judaism in this era, insinuating a period of decline.<sup>1</sup> Today, common designations are instead “Early Judaism” or “(late) Second Temple Judaism”. Scholars have become more sensitive to the polemical nature of the traditional Christian picture, especially due to E. P. Sanders’s ground-breaking study *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*.<sup>2</sup> However, the temptation to present a distorted and biased portrait of Judaism persists, especially when the New Testament polemic against various Jewish groups is taken at face value. For example, Amy-Jill Levine demonstrates how Jesus is presented in various feminist or postcolonial interpretations as the spokesman of the poor, oppressed, and women of all social strata, while (the rest of) Judaism appears as hierarchical, repressive, and misogynistic. These portraits replicate one basic assumption of theological anti-Judaism, the idea that Judaism at the time of Jesus was corrupted and in need of repair.<sup>3</sup>

The term “(late) Second Temple Judaism” also deserves to be problematized. First, the Second Temple of Jerusalem as an institution did not characterize all of Jewish life (especially in the diaspora where the majority of Jews lived), and its importance might be overemphasized in comparison to other institutions. To a certain extent, the designation reflects an artificial turning point at 70 CE when the Roman army destroyed the Jerusalem temple.<sup>4</sup> Second, in the ancient context, “Judaism” should not be taken merely as a religious concept. The debate surrounding the English translation of the Greek *Ioudaios* (Judaean/Jew) has revealed a complex set of perceptions, connotations, and engagements with ancient and present-day identities alike.<sup>5</sup> These debates are ongoing, and it has become clear that scholarly discussion on how best to conceptualize what we study and the problems with various terms we use can no longer be ignored.<sup>6</sup>

The interest in late Second Temple Judaism gradually increased after the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and subsequent excavations at the nearby settlement of Khirbet Qumran in the late 1940–50s, and especially during the major publication era of these textual finds in the 1990s.<sup>7</sup> The research on the material culture of ancient Judaism took off around this time with the discoveries of synagogues, stone vessels, and ritual baths (*miqwa’ot*) across Judaea and Galilee.<sup>8</sup> The problem is, however, that textuality does not meet with materiality in scholarship; for the most part, ideas and behaviours are still approached non-holistically.

This article is both an exercise in communication between distinct areas of expertise, including sub-fields of textual studies and archaeology, and a demonstration of the social construction of knowledge.<sup>9</sup> Scholarship changes slowly. Researchers tend to postulate the existence of a continuing process of increasing information and an understanding *shared* by all scholars. Yet, in several cases there is serious lack of interaction between scholars working on different areas and sub-fields of biblical,

Jewish, religious, and archaeological studies, and even within a single field.<sup>10</sup> In order to change the state of affairs in scholarship, we need to look deeper and do it together. This article aims at laying out some of the changes in scholarship in order to justify the need for more collaborative enterprises and to exemplify some recent advancements in that direction.

The first section addresses changes in the study of societal transitions, particularly in the use of the terms “Hellenization” and “Romanization”. Second, developments in the analysis of (textual) source materials are explored, including canonical preconceptions, generic categorization, and scholarly views concerning textuality and mediation. Third, key changes in approaching religious beliefs and practices as two distinct areas are discussed, including the relationship between material culture and ritual on the one hand, and texts and ideas on the other. While this article primarily focuses on research on Judaism in the homeland, many of the observations presented here are relevant for the study of Judaism in the diaspora as well.

## 1. Changes in Framing the Context

Scholars have often turned to the concepts of “Hellenism”, “Hellenization”, and “Romanization” in explaining cultural changes among the native communities in Judaea as being caused by their integration into new imperial networks, first Greek and then Roman. These concepts are intrinsically entwined with the study of Jewish society in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, and it was in this context that one of them first came to be used.

The historian Johann Gustav Droysen separated “Hellenism” from its counterpart “Judaism” (both as they are understood in the ancient sources) and broadened the term “Hellenism” to signify a fusion (*Verschmelzung*) of Greek and local oriental cultures across the Hellenistic world.<sup>11</sup> Droysen suggested the existence of a political and cultural continuum from classical Greece to the rise of Christianity.<sup>12</sup> The reason for linking the Greek past to Christianity so directly was to create a sense of continuity between Europe’s newly-forming nation-states and this ancient civilisation. The unfortunate result was that ancient Jews were silenced and distanced from the cultural setting of “Hellenism” as well as from European history. This fostered the illusion of a splendid cultural isolation between ancient Jewish and Greco-Roman civilizations, which became widely accepted during the 19th and early 20th centuries and has moulded scholarly histories of that era.<sup>13</sup>

When the Greek/Jewish polarity eventually dissolved in the latter half of the 20th century, scholars returned to use Droysen’s model of fusion to conceptualize the interaction between Jewish and Hellenistic cultures. This in part was sparked by the discovery and subsequent study of what were considered to be clearly non-Jewish artistic motifs in Jewish settings. How, for instance, could mosaic depictions of Helios on ancient synagogue floors be explained?<sup>14</sup> Martin Hengel, in particular, showed in his ground-breaking book *Judentum und Hellenismus* how deeply Hellenistic cultural influences penetrated Jewish society in the Hellenistic and Roman periods and how the distinction between Judaism in the homeland and in the diaspora must be rejected.<sup>15</sup> Yet

the sense of a deep conflict between Hellenistic and Jewish cultures remains crucial to Hengel's reconstruction, for he explains the rise of the Maccabees as a revolt by law-abiding Jews against the fusion of Greek and Jewish cultures. Even today, it is quite often argued that the growing political and cultural influence of Rome was met with increasing resistance from the Jews, ultimately leading to the First Jewish Revolt (66–70/74 CE).<sup>16</sup> In essence, these reconstructions serve a Christian theological purpose by presenting late Second Temple Judaism as a failed reaction against Hellenism, which made way for the rise of Christianity as a force that was able to successfully join together Jewish and Hellenistic influences.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, conflict-oriented views are based on a selective reading of available literary evidence, and there is little to support the notion that the conflict between Greco-Roman and Jewish cultures was inevitable before the First Jewish Revolt.<sup>18</sup>

More recent studies on the interaction between Jewish and Greco-Roman cultures show greater caution regarding the use of the term “Hellenism” and more awareness of varieties of cultural interaction. Erich Gruen suggests that literary and archaeological evidence related to the Hasmonean Dynasty demonstrates that Judaism and Hellenism were not competing systems and Jews did not face a choice of either assimilation or resistance.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, there is still a tendency in the field to understand changes through an outdated top-down “core-periphery” model, i.e., from “Athens/Rome to Jerusalem”. When viewed from the bottom up, more awareness can be placed on the Jewish peoples' continuous interaction with Egyptian, Syrian, Phoenician, and Arab communities. Also, more refinement is taking place in explicating various degrees of cultural interaction; distinctions are made in terms of location (region), the nature of a settlement (urban/rural), and social class of the communities in question.<sup>20</sup>

Similarly, more nuanced approaches have been developed in scholarly discussions on “Romanization”. This concept first emerged within the colonial context of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, most notably in British scholarship, as a *mission civilisatrice*. Thus, it was understood as a deliberate unilateral process of acculturation by the Roman administration to bring conquered native societies progressively towards a higher level of society and culture, thereby generating a certain unity across the empire.<sup>21</sup> From the mid-20th century onwards, when former colonies rapidly called for independence from western rule, perspectives on Roman Imperialism began to shift. Rome was converted into an “oppressor” which native societies had to “resist” or “revolt against”.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, the Roman Empire is now regarded as having been less of a centralized system and more as having relied on local autonomy within provinces and cities, with a growing role for local elites as a catalyst for changes.<sup>23</sup>

Many classical scholars urge that research should move beyond the binary Roman vs. native cultures and take into account how the spread of Roman power resulted in the formation of various types of social positioning and fluid cultural and ethnic identities.<sup>24</sup> Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, for example, argues that “Rome's cultural revolution” created possibilities for part of the population to sustain simultaneously diverse cultural systems and to “code-switch” between them, depending on the context

in which one was placed.<sup>25</sup> The situation may not have been different in Judaea, where the introduction of Hellenistic and Roman cultures through people, texts, and material culture enhanced the attractiveness of a new culture and invited participation in the empire.<sup>26</sup> Scholars dealing with the second and third centuries CE and later rabbinic Judaism have identified various forms of peaceful interactions between Jews and Roman imperial rule,<sup>27</sup> yet they have not paid due attention to similar evidence from the pre-70 CE period.

We suggest that the use of social scientific and psychological theories dealing with social, multicultural identities can clarify issues that are topical in the study of late Second Temple Jewish society. The recognition that social identities are socially constructed and always renegotiable is a necessary corrective to earlier studies that have taken ancient ethnic or religious identities as naturally given and fixed. Theories dealing with multicultural identities and multiculturalism have focused on individuals and groups who, as a result of cross-cultural exposure, have internalized at least two cultures and are comfortable with alternating between different cultural frameworks.<sup>28</sup>

This is not to deny that late Second Temple Judaism, as far as language is concerned, comes in two varieties of literary, oral and material (inscriptions) culture. That a significant segment of the Jews living outside Judaea did not understand (need) Hebrew/Aramaic is clear, just as many Jews in Judaea did not understand (need) Greek before the turn of the common era.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, it is all the more important to explore the agencies of those who used both Northwest Semitic and Greek languages fluently without one being opposed to another, and the ways in which the larger populace had points of contact with and awareness of both languages. Similarly, Judaea is often characterized by a division into socio-religious factions that competed over power and influence, and these factions are spoken of as if they remained unchanged for decades or even centuries. It should be acknowledged that our textual source material presents these groups in generalized or fixed ways in order to promote desirable group contours.<sup>30</sup> People who may have identified with such groups would have had several social identities that were salient in different situations.<sup>31</sup>

## 2. Changes in Approaching Texts, Textuality, and Canon

When new sources enter a field of study, new questions naturally accompany them. While a canonical framework dictated much of the contours of earlier research, and still continues to have an impact on how scholars categorize their ancient sources, the Dead Sea Scrolls in particular have forced biblical scholars to rethink their assumptions by demonstrating the evident lack of a set of fixed authoritative texts for all Jews at the turn of the era. In that context, it is no longer valid to speak of a canon or to evaluate the relevance of a particular text on account of its later canonical status (or the lack thereof) in Jewish or Christian communities.<sup>32</sup>

“Canonical historiography” has hardly seen an end yet, but significant changes are emerging. A good case study demonstrating this is the research on ancient prophecy, or more largely, *divination*. For a long time, biblical scholars analysed the consultation of the divine will focusing exclusively on the prophetic characters in the Hebrew Bible.



This was largely due to Julius Wellhausen and Bernhard Duhm who argued in the late 19th and early 20th centuries that biblical prophets played a significant role as speakers of truth in Israelite religion and that this truth could be reconstructed from a close reading of the texts. Their construction was no longer based on a “mimetic” reading of the Hebrew Bible as a whole in the premodern spirit of verbal inspiration, but rather on a systematic *selection* of texts deemed to represent the “genuine prophetic voice”.<sup>33</sup> Such a reading was essential for creating an “Old Testament theology”. When the study of prophecy focused on the Hebrew Bible, it was maintained that the prophetic era finished with Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.<sup>34</sup>

This theology-driven view on the inquirers of divine will is gradually shifting, not least because of the Dead Sea Scrolls that attest to varying practices concerning the divine will. Various passages in the Hebrew Bible explicitly prohibit the use of any technical devices in consulting the divine will (e.g., Lev 19:26; Deut 18:10–12).<sup>35</sup> While some texts of the Qumran collection repeat the prohibition (e.g., CD 12:1–5), others reflect more tolerant views on the technical inquiries of the divine will.<sup>36</sup> In light of several texts with references to times of birth, the position of stars, and horoscopes, it seems likely that there was acceptance of, and familiarity with, certain astrological notions. Furthermore, the Scrolls attest to physiognomic divination, which enables people to judge the future and fate of the described individuals (e.g., 4Q186; 4Q561).<sup>37</sup> By challenging the presuppositions arising from a canonical framework and the theology of the biblical prophets, the Scrolls have broadened our understanding of Jewish divination.

Nevertheless, similarly to the Hebrew Bible in which texts are heavily edited and can at best offer a secondary witness to divinatory practices, the Qumran collection does not contain any new oracles that would serve as a witness to contemporary oral prophecy.<sup>38</sup> Instead, mediation of the divine will appears to have taken place as a part of scribal practices. This phenomenon is referred to as “literary prophecy”, meaning a type of prophecy in which divine knowledge is transmitted by means of reading, writing, and textual interpretation. The messenger is a scribe who, by divine inspiration, interprets earlier writings in light of a new historical and social situation.<sup>39</sup> Texts composed in the late Hellenistic era reveal that already-existing literature, especially the torah, was consulted in order to access the divine will (e.g., 1 Macc 3:48).<sup>40</sup> Literary prophecy therefore includes some aspects of technical divination: the interpreter is a highly educated person who needs certain material objects, such as scrolls, to discover the divine will.<sup>41</sup> The divine word that comes to the scribes does not seem to provoke oral reactions as it did for the prophets known from the Hebrew Bible.<sup>42</sup>

Along with new source material, the Dead Sea Scrolls offer evidence of new *literary genres* and creative rewritings which testify to new ways of accessing the divine will. Rather than preserving new oral prophecies, the texts re-describe past events and expressions of the divine will. In Jubilees and the Temple Scroll, for example, scribes continue to endorse Moses as the supreme prophet to whom the law was communicated through divine revelation. At the same time, they offer new interpretations of Moses’s revelation and represent these interpretations as part of the original revelation granted to Moses—they themselves constitute the divine message.

The many meanings of “torah” exemplify both the centrality of Mosaic discourse and its non-fixity and usability for various aims.<sup>43</sup> While the concept was employed in a prescriptive sense in the Persian or Hellenistic periods, the explicitly halakhic tone of “torah” was established only after the Maccabean revolt.<sup>44</sup> Yet, it was never exhausted by a single meaning. Even in those legal contexts where the term has a halakhic flavour, its content might not be restricted to the Pentateuchal law as we know it, as is shown by the Qumran sectarian texts which understand “torah” to include specific lifestyle requirements.<sup>45</sup> The term continued to carry the etymological meaning of teaching with a pedagogical accent. Eva Mroczek suggests that “torah” was deemed a “loose ideal type of divine instruction or writing”.<sup>46</sup> Around 100 CE, it could still be associated with wisdom, natural order, and divine instruction.<sup>47</sup>

New texts and perspectives call for new methods of textual categorization. In modern literary studies, the existence of clearly-defined genres was questioned decades ago.<sup>48</sup> No single text has all the features of a particular class of texts, and every work inevitably changes the genre’s definition in some way.<sup>49</sup> This has been acknowledged only recently in biblical studies.<sup>50</sup> Carol Newsom, a pioneering figure in the enterprise, has argued for the relevance of “prototype theory” and the idea of “family resemblances” in genre theories.<sup>51</sup> Hindy Najman compares types of literature to constellations, for although single texts exist objectively, the existence of the type depends on the modern readers’ observations.<sup>52</sup> Significantly, unlike in classical Greece, where Aristotle famously theorized genre in his work *Poetics* and several other authors *self-consciously* produced texts of different genres (e.g., epics, tragedies, and comedies),<sup>53</sup> the Jewish texts composed in Hebrew and Aramaic do not reflect well-defined genres and thus their authorial awareness remains questionable. Those Jewish authors who wrote in Greek may have consciously employed Greek literary genres (e.g., Ezekiel the Tragedian, Pseudo-Phocylides, Philo), but Jewish literature written in Hebrew or Aramaic does not conform to the styles of Greek and Roman writings.<sup>54</sup>

The deconstruction of scholarship built on canonical categories takes time.<sup>55</sup> The search for the best possible categories, concepts, and models in the “non-canonical” era has only begun: apart from the canon, the contents of individual texts also were not fixed. The great variation between “parallel” manuscripts in the Qumran collection has raised the question of what degree of variation scholars allow in classifying two or more manuscripts as representing the same work. In general, what is a “text”, a “work”, a “copy”, or an “edition”?<sup>56</sup> Editorial work itself is *construction*—not merely reconstruction. Consequently, recent scholarly work has involved more conscious reflection on methodology and ways of selecting and presenting the data.<sup>57</sup>

Overall, the emphasis on the textual history of the Hebrew Bible has overshadowed the significance of the *medium* and its context. Literacy in the ancient world was a limited, selective mode of transmission and always in interplay with oral mediation.<sup>58</sup> This must be emphasized because medium is a key part of the message, as modern media studies demonstrate. Manuscripts carry meanings with respect to materiality and context, not only textual contents, and the Dead Sea Scrolls offer new evidence for exploring these questions.<sup>59</sup> Textual variance is intrinsically connected to manuscript culture. The “copying” of any manuscript is both an act of transmitting



earlier information and an act of introducing new information, even if only by way of representing or restructuring the existing information. At the same time, now and in the past, more *abstract* meaning-making takes place outside an individual exemplar, at the meta-level of “(oral) tradition”, “discourse”, or the like—but hardly based on any fixed textual collection. The search for the best possible models through which to understand manuscript culture prior to book-, print-, and digital cultures is still on its way. For the time being, we are invited to compare ancient textual transmission and knowledge transfer to the modern digital era, where information is constantly renewed and floating, rather than to book models with fixed ideas of completeness, moments of publication, and authorship.<sup>60</sup>

### **3. Changes in Addressing Beliefs and Practices**

Scholarly conceptions of Second Temple Judaism tend to emphasize either the history of ideas (“covenant”, “monotheism”, “apocalypticism”), or the history of practices (“prayer”, “purity laws”, “cult”). Less often are these two aspects combined into a single investigation: to what extent changes in religious life and rituals gave rise to new modes of thought, and vice versa, to what extent new ideas were transmitted, experienced, informed, and constrained by rituals and practices.<sup>61</sup> Prayer, for example, is a topic that clearly needs to be studied both for its ritual character and for the beliefs and values it transmits. Earlier scholarship tended to see daily, private prayer as a consequence of the destruction of the temple in 70 CE and not as a significant part of religious forms of Jewish life in earlier periods. This notion has been challenged by the textual evidence of prayers, even fixed prayer, from Qumran.<sup>62</sup>

In the same spirit as the biblical prophets were seen to critique the temple cult, ritual was a neglected and disdained area of study. This exemplifies the Protestant bias towards the word, thus devaluing rituals, marginalizing sacraments and their significance, and focusing on personal beliefs.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, textual sources, produced by the literate elite, always represent, to some extent, the upper levels in society and seldom give a direct voice to the lower levels. Abstract systems of thought have been the main interest of most modern scholars who study these texts. The study of the material culture relating to these texts, as well as further theorizing on rituals described in and enacted around the texts, are needed to reveal bottom-up processes that pertain to beliefs attested within the texts.<sup>64</sup>

The field of cognitive science of religion is one potential facilitator in this task, since it takes seriously the intuitive capacities, modularity, and dual processing of the human mind in order to inform religious practice and belief.<sup>65</sup> Rituals are the focus in explaining the motivational, emotional, and commitment aspects of religious movements.<sup>66</sup> Embodied cognition (ways in which bodies perceive and remember) and extended cognition (ways in which the external environment, most notably material culture,<sup>67</sup> is used to cope with the world) are essential parts of the investigation. Scholars of Jewish antiquity, both of texts and of material culture, are needed for developing and testing these theories.<sup>68</sup>

These cognitive perspectives also urge scholars to be explicit about the level of their analysis. The topic of purity is a good example. Since the publication of the Dead Sea Scrolls and new material evidence (e.g., stepped pools and chalkstone vessels), scholars have shown an increasing interest in purity. But this phenomenon demands analysis at many levels: as an abstract thought pattern in relation to worldviews and philosophical ideas of purity and holiness; as a literary and rhetorical collection of rules; as a metaphor; as a political vehicle of managing power; as an embodied practice that employs intuitive aspects; and as an extended practice shaped by engagement with its material aspects.<sup>69</sup> It remains to be investigated to what extent it is possible to identify any consistent purity system at any given time, to what extent the fine-grain nuances in halakhic discussions contributed to everyday practice or vice versa, and which differences in practice created social distinctions.

Within archaeology, there was for a long time little interest in the material aspects of Judaea in the Hellenistic and early Roman eras. Up until the mid-20th century, foremost attention was given to material evidence signalling the influence of rabbinic Judaism in this region, most notably in Galilee, after the destruction of Jerusalem's Temple in 70 CE.<sup>70</sup> Some attention was also given to the region's importance for examining the historical Jesus, but emphasis was on Jesus' interaction with Greco-Roman culture, rather than on Galilee's Jewish society.<sup>71</sup>

From the mid-20th century onwards, an increase in archaeological attention to Judaea in the Hellenistic and early Roman eras is noticeable.<sup>72</sup> This is in part a result of interest triggered by the Dead Sea Scrolls and the excavations at Khirbet Qumran, as well as the founding of the State of Israel and the subsequent professionalization of archaeology in the region. Certain religious practices—such as purity rituals and communal worship—that were hitherto known only from literary texts or inscriptions, were now connected to archaeological evidence from the first century BCE and CE. Public, rectangular buildings built during this period, lined with benches and intended for communal gatherings, were discussed exclusively as synagogues (e.g., at Masada, Gamla, and Magdala), rectangular stepped pools hewn into the bedrock and coated with waterproof plaster were identified as ritual purification baths (*miqwa'ot*), and chalkstone vessels were described as objects impervious to ritual impurity.

The subsequent exposure of more synagogues, stepped pools, and chalkstone vessels at numerous sites throughout Judaea suggested to scholars that these phenomena were widely used and shared in Jewish society.<sup>73</sup> This increased focus on the material attestation of Jewish life in the Hellenistic and early Roman periods, in combination with the renewed excavations at Sepphoris in the early-1980s, led to renewed discussions within New Testament studies on Galilee's socio-cultural milieu in the first century CE.<sup>74</sup>

Yet, the material picture of Jewish life in this period is growing more complex. This is not due simply to new insights gained from material culture, but rather results from a critical reading of related texts, especially with regard to purity practices. Stuart Miller has shown, based on an examination of the terms *miqweh* and *bet tevilah* in the rabbinic sources, that a ritual bath was not a well-defined and uniform institution. Practices other than ritual bathing—whether unknown to, ignored by, or disapproved of

by the rabbis—were likely quite common in such baths. Unlike what is often claimed, not all Jews (e.g., those part of the Qumran movement) understood chalkstone vessels to be objects to be used for avoiding ritual impurity.<sup>75</sup>

Following these implications, we have to recognize that for any particular context where stepped pools and/or chalkstone vessels are attested, their actual usage and significance is not yet known. Archaeological data has historically been approached from a top-down perspective, treated as “empty boxes” to be given meaning only through references to texts assumed to be authoritative. Instead, following other areas in the archaeology of religion, there is a need for a bottom-up, practice-oriented approach which examines how the particular qualities and contexts of these items bounded and shaped people’s behaviours and experiences.<sup>76</sup>

“Household Judaism”, a term coined by Andrea Berlin, is a good example of the more nuanced results such an approach may give us.<sup>77</sup> Berlin shows, through an examination of household goods, the appearance of a newly adopted, distinctive lifestyle among Jewish communities in the first century BCE. This approach could be further expanded to other areas of research and developed through new lines of inquiry. For example, Chad Spigel recently observed that synagogue studies have largely ignored the ancient people taking part in the activities, and so he investigated the number of people that synagogues in the region could have accommodated. Surprisingly, only 10–18 percent of Gamla’s estimated 3,000 inhabitants would have fit in its first-century CE synagogue.<sup>78</sup> By asking why so few people seem to have had access to this “public” building, we begin to explore, on archaeological grounds, the ways in which Gamla’s synagogue was used and understood by its community. This kind of evidence needs to be placed into dialogue with contemporary textual evidence in order to shed new light on Jewish society in its various localities or regions.

## **Conclusions**

Biblical scholarship long prioritized its own agenda and the canonical texts of the later Jewish and Christian communities, although those canonical categories did not exist, or were only beginning to be demarcated, in antiquity. Strong and rigid disciplinary boundaries in academia did not help in advancing comparisons between the larger fields of ancient Near Eastern and classical studies. The Hellenistic and early Roman eras were an underrated, marginal section of biblical studies. The tendency to see this period as a failed response before the rise of a “better” religion, whether Christianity or rabbinic Judaism, still lingers.

Only during the last decades has the “canonical primacy” been challenged by new textual finds such as the Dead Sea Scrolls and the consequent breaking down of earlier textual categories. We have argued that the generic categorization of texts on the basis of later canonized corpora and fixed ideas of genre and authority do not serve the analysis of the ancient textual materials. This deconstruction requires new models that arise from non-print and non-book cultures. Now the highly specified academic tribes of expertise have an opportunity to cross not only disciplinary boundaries, but also generic

groups (e.g., wisdom, apocalyptic, liturgical, and halakha) and linguistic barriers between Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek materials.

The realisation of impact from one field to another naturally takes time. Identifying themes that are of interest to several disciplines pushes the enterprise forward by refusing to accept any pre-set allocation of certain research questions to certain fields. When questions are phrased in the framework of religious studies or scientific theological research with comparative interests, mutual dialogue and comparative work are greatly facilitated. The notion of prophecy as part of divination served as a good example—including beliefs on which it is based, the kinds of divinatory practices with which it is performed, and the social setting it requires, rather than an understanding of prophecy as defined solely on the basis of the Hebrew Bible or ancient Near Eastern or Greek literature. The history of divination can no longer be written on the grounds of biblical texts alone.

In placing late Second Temple Judaism into its historical context, in interaction with surrounding cultures, and as part of the political and social changes that took place during this era, coarse generalizations often take place. “Hellenization” and “Romanization” have largely been used to denote that broader culture which was imposed upon native subjects and understood as being somehow “pure”, carrying an imaginary essence of what it means to be “Greek” or “Roman”. The concepts also incorporate teleological models of cultural change (the highest goal of human beings is to become “Greek” or “Roman”) as well as models of social evolution (such changes pave the way to modernity). When taken as binary (either/or) concepts, it is easy to see them as being in conflict with a “genuine” Jewish culture. We explored how this polarization was previously used to present continuity between Greek civilization and Christianity and, simultaneously, to dismiss Judaism.

Awareness of bottom-up processes can significantly increase our understanding of the forms that ideas and traditions take, and how certain forms of behaviour (e.g., ritual) impact the survival of social groups and ideas. In a bottom-up approach, which takes into consideration “lived religion”, scholarship will change when researchers begin to ask questions about the function and use of archaeological structures (e.g., stepped pools and synagogues) and artefacts (e.g., chalkstone vessels) on the basis of their features and contexts, rather than on the basis of inferences from textual evidence. Studying manuscripts as material artefacts can also raise new questions from this perspective. Ritual studies, the cognitive study of religion, and cognitive archaeology propose new theories that will help scholars to integrate questions concerning beliefs and practices. How people behave and move affects their thinking, and how they intuitively think or are taught to think affects their behaviour and perception of their environment.

Issues discussed here tie in with questions presented elsewhere on the role and forms of religiosity in human cultural evolution, morality, rationality, and modernity. Investigations into ancient Judaism interact with the meanings, significance, and values that contemporary societies give to their religious traditions and artefacts. Our effort in this article was a collaborative one. Even though we have covered only part of the recent changes in research on Jewish antiquity, our purpose is to renew scholarship by

challenging each other to reject essentialist conceptions, anachronistic categories, and top-down primacy in any investigation.

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<sup>1</sup> For a thorough survey of how Jews and Judaism were constructed as the antithesis of Christianity in German biblical scholarship from the 1750s until the 1950s, see Gerdmar, *Roots of Theological Anti-Semitism*.



- <sup>2</sup> For a critique of earlier Christian scholarship on Jews and Judaism, see Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 33–59.
- <sup>3</sup> Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew*, 119–90.
- <sup>4</sup> See Schwartz and Weiss, *Was 70 CE a Watershed*.
- <sup>5</sup> See Mason, “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism;” Runesson, “Inventing,” 62–70; Law and Halton, *Jew and Judean: A MARGINALIA Forum*; and three reviews by Miller, “The Meaning of Ioudaios,” “Ethnicity Comes of Age,” and “Ethnicity, Religion.”
- <sup>6</sup> Other designations for the period carry their own baggage. “Intertestamental period” has a strong Christian flavour, characterizing an interim time between the two “Testaments.” “Early Judaism” came to signify the idea that Judaism separated from the earlier “Israelite religion” only during this period. While the concept is useful in some respects (e.g., it includes sources that were composed after 70 CE), it still creates a division from the earlier period that is not fully justified. See Collins and Harlow, *Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism*.
- <sup>7</sup> E.g., Collins and Lim, *Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls*. But it has also been argued that the “fascination with Qumran” diminished interest in other fields within Second Temple Judaism, e.g., in the study of Philo of Alexandria; see Terian, “Had Philo Been Newly Discovered,” 86.
- <sup>8</sup> “Judaea” refers here approximately to the area of the later Roman province established in 6 CE, which encompassed large extents of the former Hasmonean and Herodian kingdoms, including the regions of Judea, Samaria, and Idumea. Galilee became formally part of the *provincia Iudaea* in the late first century CE, but that is commonly understood as a separate region from Judaea.
- <sup>9</sup> It is our conviction that future scholarship is a collective enterprise; yet true dialogue and interaction requires conscious effort-making in fields where scholars have typically been trained to work alone. For the advantages of collective writing, see Hakkarainen et al., “Interagency, Collective Creativity, and Academic Knowledge Practices.”
- <sup>10</sup> As an example of a research history that has, especially during the past 150 years, suffered from a lack of interaction with previous scholarship, see Yli-Karjanmaa, *Reincarnation in Philo of Alexandria*, 9–29.
- <sup>11</sup> Droysen, *Geschichte des Hellenismus*. “Hellenism” finds its origin in debates on the nature of ancient Jews, going back as far as the early 17th century, and came to cover not only a connotation of Greek language, but also a way of thinking of the Greek-speaking Jews. The earliest discussions revolve around Acts 6:1, where a contrast is made between *hebraioi* and *hellēnistai*, Greek-speaking Jews. The term *hellēnismos*, on the other hand, derives from 2 Macc 4:13 as an opposing term to the neologism *ioudaismos* (2:21, 14:38); *hellēnismos* in this context refers to the Jews’ adoption of a Greek way of living. See Momigliano, “J. G. Droysen,” 142; Bichler, “*Hellenismus*,” 5–32. However, Gruen (“Hellenism and Judaism,” 54) points out that the term “Hellenism” is rarely used as a mode of designation in ancient texts.
- <sup>12</sup> Momigliano, “J. G. Droysen,” 142, 151–53; Wallace-Hadrill, *Rome’s Cultural Revolution*, 20.
- <sup>13</sup> More on this aspect, see Rutgers, *Jews in Late Ancient Rome*, 43–49; Rajak, “Jews and Greeks,” 543.
- <sup>14</sup> Arguably the most discussed imagery is the Helios-and-zodiac motif depicted on the mosaic floor of the sixth-century CE Beth Alpha synagogue, located west of Beth She’an, which was exposed by Eleazar Sukenik during excavations in 1928–29. The foremost early study of this Jewish art is Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*.

- <sup>15</sup> Hengel, *Judentum und Hellenismus*; *ibid.*, “Judaism and Hellenism Revisited,” 6–37.  
Hengel’s seminal study draws explicitly on Droysen’s model. See also Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine*.
- <sup>16</sup> Most scholars have abandoned Hengel’s thesis of a unified Jewish resistance movement that was instrumental in events leading to the First Jewish Revolt. See Hengel, *The Zealots*. Yet it is still common, especially in scholarship dealing with early Christianity, to describe the era before the revolt as one of growing economic and social distress and mounting anti-imperial attitudes among Jewish groups. Cf. Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society*, 88–89; Oakman, *Political Aims of Jesus*, 45–78; and Horsley, *Jesus and the Politics of Roman Palestine*, 28–40. Instead, there were mixed responses to the conflict, and McLaren, “Searching for Rome and the Imperial Cult,” rightly stresses the shared affiliation with, and concern for, the Jerusalem cult behind Galilean support for the revolt.
- <sup>17</sup> Collins, “Judaism as *Praeparatio evangelica*,” 226–28; Penner, “The Challenge from Within.”
- <sup>18</sup> See Feldman, “How Much Hellenism” for a critique; see also Goodman, *Rome and Jerusalem*; McLaren, “Searching for Roma.”
- <sup>19</sup> Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism*, 1–40. See also Gruen, “Hellenism and Judaism,” where he convincingly argues that “Hellenism” and “Hellenization” should be largely understood as characterizing an “inherent overlap” rather than “calculated interweaving” of different social and cultural norms upon native communities.
- <sup>20</sup> For discussion on “Hellenism” in the context of the Jewish population, see Levine, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 3–32; Feldman, *Judaism and Hellenism Reconsidered*, 1–34.
- <sup>21</sup> The concept was introduced by the German historian Theodor Mommsen, who was taught by Droysen, but received most attention under the influence of the British historian and archaeologist Haverfield, *Romanization of Roman Britain*. On the impact of modern colonialism on “Romanization”, see Hingley, *Roman Officers and English Gentlemen*. This debate has primarily concerned Western provinces, and what happened in the Roman East has been (and remains) much overlooked. See Versluys, “Understanding Objects in Motion,” 11.
- <sup>22</sup> E.g., Mattingly, *An Imperial Possession*; *ibid.*, *Imperialism, Power and Identity*. Cf. the situation in New Testament studies where early Christianity is depicted as an anti-imperial movement, e.g., McKnight and Modica, *Jesus Is Lord, Caesar Is Not*.
- <sup>23</sup> Most notably, see M. Millett’s seminal study of “self-Romanization,” where native elites first adopted the Roman ways of living (and associated material culture) as a response to changing political realities and as a strategy for promotion and economic advantage. By emulation, these ways of living (and material culture) filtered through to the non-elites of that society; Millett, *The Romanization of Britain*, 3–7. On these changing perspectives after the mid-20th century, see Woolf, “Beyond Romans and Natives.”
- <sup>24</sup> Woolf, “Beyond Romans and Natives”; Whitmarsh, “Thinking Local,” 1–16.
- <sup>25</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, *Rome’s Cultural Revolution*, 27–28.
- <sup>26</sup> McCane, “Simply Irresistible.”
- <sup>27</sup> Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society*; Lapin, *Rabbis as Romans*.
- <sup>28</sup> Huynh, Nguyen, and Benet-Martínez, “Bicultural Identity Integration.”
- <sup>29</sup> Ben Sira’s grandson acknowledged the significance of language when he stated in the Prologue to Greek Sirach: “[F]or what was originally expressed in Hebrew does not have the same force when it is in fact rendered in another language. And not only in this case [of Sirach] but also in the case of the Law itself and the Prophets and the rest of the books the difference is not small when these are expressed in their own language” (trans.

Pietersma and Wright, eds. *NETS*). Language does not mediate merely meaning but also culture, the way of being in the world. When the translator of LXX Gen 1:2 wrote that the earth was “invisible,” ἀόρατος, he used a word which in Platonic philosophy is a technical term for the realm of the intelligible and never-changing things. That Philo then interprets the creation account of Genesis 1 in terms of this scheme (the noetic model and its sense-perceptible copy) comes as no surprise.

- <sup>30</sup> For example, scholars have become increasingly aware of how deeply the portraits of the Pharisees in the Dead Sea Scrolls, the New Testament Gospels, Josephus’ texts, and early rabbinic sources have been influenced by rhetorical and ideological agendas. If each source is described on its own terms and within its own framework, conflicting images of the Pharisees arise. Cf. Green, “What Do We Really Know about the Pharisees.” Likewise, different New Testament portraits of the Pharisees are integrated into the theological and literary concerns of each author, see Marshall, *Portrayals*, 242–246.
- <sup>31</sup> The Qumran movement is a good example. It was long seen as a marginalized, isolated group. When the rule text evidence is taken into full consideration, without the assumption that this movement was restricted to Khirbet Qumran, it supports an association-type movement where members met regularly but also faced non-members; see Collins, *Beyond the Qumran Community*; Gillihan, *Civic Ideology*; Jokiranta, *Social Identity and Sectarianism*. For a recent social-identity approach in Early Christianity, see Hakola, *Reconsidering Johannine Christianity*.
- <sup>32</sup> See, e.g., Najman, “The Vitality of Scripture,” and the recent Canon Forum in <http://www.ancientjewreview.com/articles/canon-an-ajr-forum>. For the hegemony of the term “biblical” shadowing everything else in Second Temple literature as non-biblical, pre-biblical, or biblical interpretation, see Mroczek, “The Hegemony of the Biblical.”
- <sup>33</sup> Nissinen, “Prophecy as Construct.”
- <sup>34</sup> Cf. Jewish sources indicating that the time of the prophets finished after Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, when the Holy Spirit left Israel (e.g., 1 Macc 9:27; *t. Sotah* 13.2–4; *Seder Olam Rabbah* 30, and *b. Sanherin* 11a).
- <sup>35</sup> Since some biblical passages value prophecy over technical divination, there has been a sharp distinction drawn between prophecy and technical divination in past research. However, prophecy can be seen as one form of divination, often called “intuitive divination,” “non-inductive divination,” or “non-technical divination.” While technical divination requires knowledge of learned techniques (e.g., astrology) for the divine message to be transmitted, no such techniques are used in prophecy; Nissinen, “What is Prophecy,” 21–22.
- <sup>36</sup> See Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity*, 103–52, who, e.g., discusses prophecy in various apocalyptic compositions.
- <sup>37</sup> Esp. Popović, *Reading the Human Body*.
- <sup>38</sup> Nissinen, “Oracles at Qumran?”
- <sup>39</sup> Lange, “Literary Prophecy and Oracle Collection,” 248–50; Jassen, *Mediating the Divine*, 197–240, 343–62.
- <sup>40</sup> See further Horst, “Ancient Jewish Bibliomancy.”
- <sup>41</sup> Nissinen, “Pesharim as Divination,” 59–60.
- <sup>42</sup> Recent scholarship emphasizes the role of scribes even in the case of prophecies preserved in the Hebrew Bible. Only a few prophetic figures are known to have written down their own messages; see Nissinen, “Since When do the Prophets Write?” and Tervanotko, “Levites and Literature.”
- <sup>43</sup> During the early periods of Israelite religion, “torah” was used in the lexical sense of “instruction”; yet it was the king rather than a law code who held ultimate authority. Later

- the concept came to denote the divine revelation of Moses and even the entire legal heritage of Judaism (e.g., Ezra 7:6, Neh 8–10). Note that the Greek rendering νόμος, in particular, did not transmit the dynamic character of the Hebrew word and contributed to the formation of its static tone. For Mosaic discourse, see Najman, *Seconding Sinai*.
- <sup>44</sup> Collins, “The Transformation of the Torah in Second Temple Judaism.”
- <sup>45</sup> Kampen, “‘Torah’ and Authority.” A member of the Qumran movement was expected to take an oath to return to the torah of Moses and everything revealed from it (CD 15:1–16:6; 1QS 5:7b–20) and to commit to the communal gatherings, possessions, jurisdiction, and penalties.
- <sup>46</sup> Mroczek, “Thinking Digitally,” 251. See also Uusimäki, “Happy is the Person to Whom She Has Been Given,” 345–359.
- <sup>47</sup> Hogan, “The Meanings of *tôrâ* in 4 *Ezra*.”
- <sup>48</sup> See, e.g., Derrida, “The Law of Genre,” 65.
- <sup>49</sup> Perloff, “Introduction,” 4.
- <sup>50</sup> Najman and Popović, eds., *Rethinking Genre*.
- <sup>51</sup> Newsom, “Spying out the Land.”
- <sup>52</sup> Najman, “The Idea of Biblical Genre,” 316.
- <sup>53</sup> For ancient Greek notions of genre, see, e.g., Genette, *The Architext*; Laird, ed. *Oxford Readings*.
- <sup>54</sup> See Najman, “The Idea of Biblical Genre.”
- <sup>55</sup> E.g., Becker and Scholz, eds. *Kanon in Konstruktion und Dekonstruktion*.
- <sup>56</sup> Tigchelaar, “The Material Variance of the Dead Sea Scrolls”. For a case study, see Jokiranta and Vanonen, “Multiple Copies of Rule Texts or Multiple Rule Texts?”
- <sup>57</sup> For editorial and material aspects of scrolls, see Tigchelaar, “Constructing, Deconstructing and Reconstructing Fragmentary Manuscripts” and “Editing the Hebrew Bible.”
- <sup>58</sup> See Schmidt, ed. *Contextualizing Israel’s Sacred Writings*. For media studies within biblical studies, see Silverman, *Persepolis and Jerusalem*, 98–129.
- <sup>59</sup> Scribal marks such as the *vacat* spaces help us to see how the text was structured, and what might change if another scribe structured it differently. It may also be possible to make a distinction between a precious manuscript and a more modest one. The collections of texts copied in the same scrolls also have an impact on the meaning. See, e.g., Tov, *Scribal Practices*; Davies and Römer, *Writing the Bible*; Lied and Lundhaug, *Snapshots of Evolving Traditions*.
- <sup>60</sup> Mroczek, “Thinking Digitally,” 241–69; Jokiranta, “What is ‘Serekh ha-Yahad (S)’?”
- <sup>61</sup> A notable exception being Sanders, *Judaism: Practice & Belief*.
- <sup>62</sup> Penner, *Patterns of Daily Prayer*. Further, the increase and modifications in *praise* forms during this era await fuller explanation, see Pajunen, “The Praise of God,” Jokiranta, “Towards a Cognitive Theory of Blessing.”
- <sup>63</sup> For the strong disregard in biblical studies of rituals, which have been viewed as “empty” practices, see Smith, *To Take Place*. More recently, Gruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual Theory*, approaches rituals completely apart from ideology and symbolic expression.
- <sup>64</sup> E.g., Klingbeil, *Bridging the Gap*. The Dead Sea discoveries play an important role in this re-evaluation with more focus on halakhic material, purity practices and liturgical and prayer practices; see, e.g., Brooke, “The Theological Function of Prayer.”
- <sup>65</sup> For an introduction, see Pyysiäinen, “Cognitive Science of Religion.”
- <sup>66</sup> For example, it has been suggested that differences in the cognition of ritual form bear on the centrality of ritual in a religious tradition; Lawson and McCauley, *Rethinking Religion*.

- <sup>67</sup> See, e.g., Boivin, *Material Cultures, Material Minds*; Malafouris, *How Things Shape the Mind*.
- <sup>68</sup> See already Luomanen, Pyysiäinen, and Uro, eds. *Explaining Christian Origins*; Flannery, Shantz, and Werline, eds. *Experientia*; Czachesz and Uro, eds. *Mind, Morality, and Magic*. The last volume exemplifies work where biblical scholars participate in developing and critiquing some of the CSR theories (e.g., Whitehouse's memory model).
- <sup>69</sup> For recent work, see Frevel and Nihan, *Purity*; for initial steps towards clarification of the levels of analysis, see Kazen, *Emotions in Biblical Law*.
- <sup>70</sup> E.g., Schlouchz's excavations of a synagogue at Hammath Tiberias (1920–21), Mazar's and Avigad's excavations of the Jewish necropolis of Beth She'arim (1936–40, 1953–61), and Kohl and Watzinger's surveys and excavations of late-antique synagogues (1905–6).
- <sup>71</sup> E.g., Case, "Jesus and Sepphoris." This, for example, instigated excavations at Sepphoris in 1931 during which, among other things, a Roman theatre was discovered.
- <sup>72</sup> E.g., in the mid-1960s the remains of a former Hasmonean and Herodian palace-fortress were exposed at Masada, a site that was later converted into a hideout for Jewish zealots during the First Jewish Revolt (66–70/74 CE). From the mid-1970s onwards, excavations exposed large parts of Gamla in the modern Golan Heights, which from the early first century BCE onwards was the Hasmoneans' administrative centre in the north. In 1969–82, large-scale excavations in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem (re-named "the Herodian Quarter") exposed the remains of first-century CE elite residences near the Jerusalem Temple.
- <sup>73</sup> On synagogues, see Olsson and Zetterholm, eds., *The Ancient Synagogue*; Runesson, Binder and Olsson, *The Ancient Synagogue*; Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 45–80. On stepped pools, see Reich, *Jewish Ritual Baths*. On chalkstone vessels, see Magen, *The Stone Vessel Industry*. On stepped pools and chalkstone vessels, see also Adler, "The Decline of Jewish Ritual Purity Observance." This evidence has been used to support the notion of "common Judaism", see Sanders, *Judaism: Practice & Belief*; Meyers, "Sander's 'Common Judaism'."
- <sup>74</sup> For a good overview of these renewed discussions with regard to Jewish life in first-century Galilee, see Chancey, *The Myth of a Gentile Galilee and Greco-Roman Culture*.
- <sup>75</sup> Miller, *At the Intersection of Texts and Material Finds*, 32–103, 153–83.
- <sup>76</sup> Fogelin, "Archaeology of Religious Ritual;" Raja and Rüpke, *Companion to the Archaeology of Religion*.
- <sup>77</sup> Berlin, "Jewish Life Before the Revolt."
- <sup>78</sup> Spigel, *Ancient Synagogue Seating Capacities*, 75–90. Even if only men were granted access, the majority of Gamla's population would not have been able to use this synagogue regularly. Spigel's study included mostly late-antique synagogues. Other sites would benefit from similar analysis. See also Olsson and Zetterholm, eds., *The Ancient Synagogue*, for recent discussions.